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AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK ANDERSON

BARBARA WALTERS: On another subject very much in the news, the institution of the news leak was accorded a sort of new dignity last week. Vice President Agnew's lawyers obtained something new in American history -- subpoena power to help them try to find out where news week -- news leaks about the Vice President have been originating.

Columnist Jack Anderson, who has a new book out, will probably -- and has published more inside information than any other current reporter. His book is called, "The Anderson Papers," and it deals in great part with this subject, the dangers and the benefits of news that is leaked from unidentified sources.

Jack Anderson is in our Washington studio with "Today" Washington Editor, Bill Monroe.

Good morning, gentlemen.

BILL MONROE: Good morning, Barbara.

I intended to ask Jack Anderson about some of the revelations in his book, "The Anderson Papers," but he has come in, I gather -- he travels around with some secret papers in his inside coat pocket and he's got some papers here that may shed some light on what's happening in the Middle East, and answering Dick Valeriani's question of why.

What can you tell us from information you have, Jack, about what this war is all about?

JACK ANDERSON: Well, I did bring a few of the papers and from these papers that have been made available it looks almost as if this war could have been the result of just plain fierce pride on the part of the Arabs.

MONROE: Is that secret government documents you're not supposed to have?

ANDERSON: Yes. But the news -- the news belongs to the people. The news doesn't belong to the government, and we're entitled to know what's going on.

Here is a secret CIA report, and this secret CIA report quotes the Syrian Army Chief as saying that he believed there was no choice but to fight Israel again, and that Syria was actively preparing for the battle -- this in advance of the war. He said that despite the fact that we, or even you, might say all the Arabs combined are weaker than Israel, there is no other choice. We must fight, and we will fight.

And then the Syrian President Assad...

MONROE: Do we know where that quotation came from...

ANDERSON: That quotation was given by an Arab political leader in exile to the CIA.

Syrian President Assad reiterated Talas's (?) comment.

MONROE: Where -- where does this come from, the...

ANDERSON: The same source.

MONROE: Uh-huh.

ANDERSON: To -- he -- this is a source who has access to these people, and he has reported it to the CIA.

He -- he reiterated that there's no choice but to fight, but he says -- and he commented very wryly -- that perhaps the Syrian Army would find itself alongside the Jordan-Arab Army. And the Syrians and Jordans -- and the Jordanians never got along -- as the only two armies which would fight Israel fiercely, since he did not expect too much from the Egyptians even if they initiated the fighting.

Now, that may be the clue to it from the reports that I've got here, Bill, because here is a State Department cable, this is a secret State Department cable which quotes Israeli authorities, that the Israeli leadership -- we believe it says that the Israeli leadership considers Egypt to be capable now with virtually no further preparation, and this with practically no warning, to launch a renewed war of attrition along the Suez Canal. But it cites a tendency among Arabs, Bill -- a tendency among Arabs, which the Israelis have noted, to treat Sadat's threats toward Israel with derision.

In other words, the Arabs -- and we got this quote from President Assad of Syria -- belittle the threats that Sadat has made. There's another intelligence report here quoting some of the threats that he has made.

MONROE: On the basis of that, the idea might be that Sadat to make himself credible and to indicate that his threats are not empty, may have been forced partly for these reasons, to go to war.

ANDERSON: Exactly what this -- this in advance of the attack, this -- this -- this a few months ago. Israelis feel that it is this credibility gap of Sadat's within the Arab world which conceivably could lead him, even against his better judgment, to decide to resume shooting.

MONROE: An implication here that some of these leaders may figure that, I will probably lose, but the pressure's on me as such, I have to go to war.

ANDERSON: It's this fierce pride that they have. Here -- here were the Syrian Chief-of-Staff, the Syrian President saying, yes, the Israelis are stronger than we are, but we must fight.

MONROE: Let me ask you a question I'm sure a lot of people would want asked. You're sitting here reading from what are described as secret documents, CIA and State Department. What is your responsibility as a journalist to be concerned about whether your reading these documents might give the U. S. Government a great deal of trouble?

ANDERSON: Well, as I say, this is news, and the news doesn't belong to the government. The news belongs to the people.

As far as not -- you probably have noticed there are some portions blanked out, and the portions were blanked out by my source because these are matters of genuine security.

On top of that the book that you have in your hand -- I had some information, and the head of the CIA, the former head, when I was writing the book -- Richard Helms -- knew that I had some information and called me and asked to sit down with me. We had lunch together over at the Madison Hotel here in Washington. And he said, now, I know you've got this information and you probably think that it's all right to use, because it was information that the Soviets knew about. And I would have thought that it was all right to use because I couldn't see any security involved if the Soviets knew about it. But he explained that the fact that we had it -- the Soviets didn't know that we had it -- and the fact that we had this information at all could compromise some of their sources. And he asked me not to use it, so you won't find that in the book. I do believe the government has the right to some secrets.

MONROE: Where do you get your sources from? You talk in the book during the Bangladesh situation, as I understand it, of having staff members working under Henry Kissinger, coming to you two blocks away from the White House, meeting in front

of a drug store counter, whispering some information to you that bore on some secret papers that several Kissinger staff members had already furnished you -- why do people, let us say, in this case, working for Henry Kissinger, go privately to a newsman and tell him things that might undermine what Kissinger's trying to do?

ANDERSON: Well, in this case -- and -- and it's pretty well documented in the book, documented out of the secret minutes and the secret memos.. It looked like we were moving to the edge of a nuclear showdown on the Bay of Bengal. These were people who were concerned about it, who thought that maybe some irresponsible judgments had been made. The secret intelligence reports show quite clearly that Soviets -- that first the Chinese were gearing for war, that they were preparing to attack India, making all the advance preparations. The secret intelligence reports showed further that -- that the Soviets had told the Indians that if such an attack came, that they would attack China. The intelligence report showed that we were making preparations to go into the Bay of Bengal ourselves.

MONROE: And these staff member -- members were disturbed about the policy?

ANDERSON: They were disturbed about the policy. They were people who felt that they worked for the American people. These -- these were aides who felt that they did not work for Henry Kissinger, because Henry Kissinger wasn't paying their salary. They worked for the American people, who did pay their salary.

MONROE: Jack, thank you very much for being with us this morning.

Jack Anderson, columnist and author of, "The Anderson Papers," along with George Clifford.